

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Preparing for Christmas 2020 - This Christmas

December 7, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

Today's Reading:

Thanksgiving is behind us, and we've officially started the Christmas season. Christmas music is playing on every single radio station throughout the entire country (maybe a slight exaggeration). We've already made several trips to Target (not mentioned in the Bible, but you have to wonder where the wise men got their gifts!). Can you remember this time last year? How do those memories compare to this year? Well, for most of us, this Christmas is shaping up to be like no other.

Even though so much in our world has changed, one thing has not! We are still preparing to celebrate the birth of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The truth and power of Christmas remains unchanged. And as Lead Pastor Ben Snyder said over the weekend, "**You prepare for what you care for.**" So, how will *you* prepare for this most unusual Christmas?

Since it is so unusual, we have opportunities to prepare differently, to experience the power and the truth of Christmas in ways that perhaps we have never done before. In this Advent season, we need to prepare our hearts for the arrival of the most notable person in all of history—Jesus of Nazareth—and step into the belief that he will come again! Will you be ready?

"We prepare for what we care for." Ask yourself:

- Have I made the focus of my life the one true God, creator of all that is and ever was?
- Do I worship him alone, or are there false idols in my life that consume my time and attention?
- Can I set my focus to turn away from the things I need to leave behind, turn around, and anticipate what God will do in my life if I yield to him wholeheartedly?

This Christmas season offers a unique opportunity to refocus and reframe what Christmas is to us as followers of Jesus. It is a gift. It is an invitation. It is anticipation of the one who was sent as a baby to relate to us and to communicate God's love to us in a language we can understand, his word in human flesh.

John 1:14

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

The crazy circumstances of this year will most likely not end at the ringing in of 2021. But our confidence is not in this world, which is steeped in sin and ruled by Satan. Our confidence is in Jesus, who gave up heaven to come to Earth as a baby to communicate God's overwhelming love to us. Jesus still comes and he brings his peace to those who accept it.

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you all.

Questions:

How will you prepare your heart for Jesus this Christmas?

Have you made room for him?

Is there something you need to let go of in order to receive him?

Next Steps:

Once you have determined what needs to go, be sure to share your decision with a trusted Christian friend who loves you, will celebrate your decision with you, and will help you through your struggles. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring you the strength you need to put Jesus first in your life.

Prayer:

My sweet Jesus, in this Advent season, my heart longs for you. I want you to be the one and only focus of my heart. "Holy Spirit, love divine, dwell within this heart of mine. Tear down every idol throne. Reign supreme. Reign alone." This is my prayer. Amen.*

*From *Streams in the Desert* by L.B. Cowman.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Read: [Isaiah 9:6](#)

Long before Jesus, God promised that a special child would be born. Think about the last promise you made. Did you keep it? You can have hope because God always keeps his promises.

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Lauri White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Faithful From the Start - This Christmas

December 8, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

Today's Reading:

I have always been one of those people who refuses to start the Christmas season before Thanksgiving. It annoys me to no end when I see Christmas-themed sale displays in the stores before Halloween. My wife is all-in, though. She loves it when 101.5 switches over to Christmas music and lights are hung around the neighborhood. The earlier the better, in her opinion. She claims that it stretches a great season of joy out, and what's wrong with that?

I will admit, this year, I'm with her. I feel like we all deserve an extra few weeks of Christmas cheer. So this year, I actually took time off work to get our decorations out early and begin preparing to celebrate Christmas.

Decorating the tree, hanging lights, listening to Christmas music are all ways we prepare for Christmas, but when it comes to *really* preparing for the Christmas season, we need to prepare our hearts.

One of the ways we can do this is by focusing on the reason we celebrate Christmas. The obvious answer to the question is we are celebrating Jesus' birth, but it goes deeper than that. We are also celebrating God's faithfulness to his promises, starting with the first promise we find in the Bible in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:15

"And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

You may be wondering what this promise has to do with Christmas, but it is about God's plan to rescue us from sin and restore our relationship with him. In the beginning, when [Adam and Eve chose to listen to the serpent](#) in the Garden instead of God, they fractured man's relationship with God. God could have bailed on us right then and there, but he loved us so much that he immediately formulated his plan to restore our relationship with him and defeat Satan. This plan included a promise to deliver a fatal blow to Satan through Eve's offspring, ending sin's power in our lives.

The offspring from Eve came thousands of years after God spoke these words in Genesis. He came in the form of a baby, born to a virgin in a manger. His name was Emmanuel, *God with us*, and he was the promised Savior the world had been waiting for. We celebrate his birth because it was the beginning of God's process to restore us to him.

As we enter this season, prepare your heart by focusing on the truth that God loves you and wants to be in a relationship with you so much that he planned and executed a way to restore your relationship with him. Today, no matter where you are, or how far away God feels, know that God continues to want to have a relationship with you. He shows us this through every fulfilled promise, starting with his faithfulness to his first promise.

Questions:

On a scale of one to ten, how prepared are you for this Christmas?

What can we learn about God's love for us from his immediate plan to restore man's broken relationship with him?

To what promises have you witnessed God's faithfulness in your life?

Next Steps:

List all of the things you need to do to prepare for Christmas. Start with practical items. Something like: 1) Figure out what my spouse wants for Christmas; 2) Schedule time to make the purchase; 3) Hang Christmas lights. End your list with spiritual items. Include things like: 1) Make room for God in my life today; 2) Read the LivingItOut today; 3) Focus on God's fulfilled promises in my life.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving us. Thank you for making a way for us to have a relationship with you. From the moment sin entered the world, your response was to rescue us from it. You did not bail on us then, and you won't bail on us today. Your character remains the same, and today, I praise you for your faithfulness. As I enter this Christmas season, help me to prepare for it by focusing on you and your love for me, and as I do, use me to share your love with those around me. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

As a family, discuss some of your favorite Christmas memories. What will you do this year to celebrate the birth of Jesus? Some examples include: reading Christmas stories, baking a birthday cake for Jesus, or singing Christmas carols.

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Ben Bockert, a regular contributor to the LivingitOut.

Fa la la la la, la la la la - This Christmas

December 9, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

Today's Reading:

As we deck the halls, knowing that this crazy year has brought with it lots of changes and unexpected circumstances, we may not feel the wide-eyed Christmas wonder we once did as children. We may not even feel the joy and peace we felt last year. Perhaps we are **dwelling** on these circumstances and not clearly **seeing** them. Perhaps we are stressing too much, feeling trapped, and even questioning what God is doing. Perhaps God is testing us like he tested Abraham.

Genesis 22:2

"Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."

Imagine what Abraham must have been thinking. God had promised Abraham countless descendants, and that he would be the father of many nations of people. Abraham believed this promise would be fulfilled through his son Isaac, but now God was asking him to place Isaac on an altar and sacrifice him!?

Imagine the emotions and questions that would enter someone's mind in a test such as this. He must have experienced emotions of anger, frustration, confusion, and sorrow to name a few. Surely, he must have had questions like "Is this really happening?" "Isn't there another way?"

Abraham trusted God though. God had been faithful to his promises to this point, and Abraham trusted that God would continue to be faithful to his promises moving forward. Even when he didn't see how.

Genesis 22:10-13

¹⁰ And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice.¹¹ At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"

¹² *“Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”* ¹³ *Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.*

A few thousand years later, God provided another sacrifice—his son, Jesus—to be punished for our sins, in our place. It is a gift that God offers to each of us. A gift of salvation and peace.

Throughout this year, we have certainly experienced emotions of anger, fear, and frustration. We have all had questions of uncertainty and times when we haven’t seen a way out. Like Abraham, we have an opportunity to trust God with our doubts and uncertainty and believe that he will provide in ways we can’t yet see.

As we enter this Christmas season, let’s acknowledge our doubts and fears and repent for not trusting God. Just like God provided for Abraham, he has provided for us. He has provided the answer to all of our questions in Jesus. As we focus on this truth, we will be prepared for the good gifts that God has for us this Christmas season, and whatever is ahead.

Questions:

What would you have done if you were Abraham? What if you had been Mary? Or Joseph? Would you have trusted God? Do you trust God now?

Next Steps:

Read the Bible and talk to others about what it means. Ready yourself and your house to serve the Lord. Deck the Halls!

Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, help me to prepare my heart and mind for the miracle of Christmas! Oh Happy Day! Amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Read: [Joshua 21:45](#)

God always keeps his promises. How can you stay hopeful even when you don't get what you want?

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Pam Haynam, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Remembering God's Faithfulness - This Christmas

December 10, 2020

Find today's Family Advent Activity at the bottom of today's reading.

Today's Reading:

If you had to choose between never seeing a good friend again but keeping all your shared memories, or seeing your friend every day but never remembering your time together, which would you choose?

This question makes me realize the importance of memories. Without our memories, we don't know who we are, where we've been, or where we're going. Memories are recordings of our life and proof of our existence.

Today, we are going to look at the story of how God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and how they forgot about God's faithfulness and goodness.

The Israelites were enslaved, and through many miracles, God freed them and brought them out of Egypt. He saved them from the Egyptian army's pursuit and even dried up the Red Sea so they could cross it. Miraculous! But as soon as they entered the wilderness and didn't see food or water, they quickly forgot all the miracles God had performed for them. They began complaining and wanted to return to Egypt. They had clearly forgotten God's goodness and his saving power.

God could have left them on their own, but instead he responded by continuing to pursue them and offering a relationship with them. When their attitude was awful, when they chose to sin, and when they complained, he didn't abandon them. He always made a way for them to return to him. He had them build the Ark of the Covenant where his presence could reside. He instructed them on how to build a temple where they could meet with him. When they chose other God's over him, he provided a prophet to show them their error and remind them of God's goodness and love for them.

As we enter this Christmas season, let's rejoice that God has made a way for us to be in a relationship with him—even when our attitude is awful, we commit sins, or complain like the Israelites did. Again, he didn't choose to abandon us. Instead, he sent his son to Earth to die for our sins. As we get ready to celebrate

Jesus' birth, let's prepare by identifying the attitudes and actions for which we need to repent and ask God's forgiveness, and let's thank God for his son, Jesus, our Savior.

Questions:

Which of God's miracles have you forgotten? What have you been complaining about? What attitudes or actions do you need to repent?

Next Steps:

Journal your walk with God and record all he has done for you.

Prayer:

God, help me to remember your faithfulness. Turn my focus and heart toward you. I repent of my bad attitudes and actions and turn away from lifeless pursuits. Grow my trust in you, and draw me into a deeper relationship with you. Amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Decorate Christmas cards to give to family and friends, celebrating the promise and birth of Jesus.

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

O Come O Come Emmanuel – This Christmas

December 11, 2020

Find today's Family Advent Activity at the bottom of today's reading.

Today's Reading:

O come, O come, Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer

Our spirits by Thine advent here

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night

And death's dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, O come, Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel

According to the book, “The Soul Felt Its Worth,” by Cameron Frank and Preston Norman, some say “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” was written as early as the 12th century. But the oldest original form dates to 1710. It is based on chants sung by early Christians called the “O Antiphons” that focused heavily on the power behind the many names of Jesus.

“Names reflect identity. The names of God describe the attributes of God, and just as His names don’t change, His attributes don’t change,” Frank and Norman wrote.

While this Christmas is likely to be different than any other one you’ve celebrated, The Good News is: *God is still the same.*

Isaiah 7:14

“All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).”

When people first heard the name Immanuel, they anticipated Jesus’ birth and his walking with them on earth. How thrilling it must have been to be alive at this time!

As we approach Christmas, we aren’t looking forward to a heavenly baby, but we can still celebrate *God with us*. Though he isn’t walking the earth, he is just as much *with us* when we follow Jesus.

As people anticipated the birth of Jesus, they expected the arrival of a king who would lead on their behalf and defeat their enemies. But what they received was much better. They received the humble, gentle, fierce, loving, bold, exciting, unpredictable perfect Son of God, Jesus. And we are still receiving that gift today. As Jesus said in [John 16:7](#), the gift is even better now that we are able to receive the Holy Spirit to live personally and intimately with us. Always WITH US.

Questions:

What does the name Immanuel, God with us, mean to you?

How can you celebrate God never leaving your side this Christmas season?

Next Steps:

Check out "[The Soul Felt Its Worth](#)." It unpacks a song for each day counting down to Christmas.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for never leaving our side. Allow us to feel your presence, especially as we enter this Christmas season in this strange year. Help us to stay focused on you through the craziness, and to know that while our world is always changing around us, you always stay the same. Amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

How have you seen God take care of our family? Through good times and hard times, God is always with us. He never breaks his promises. We can thank God for his faithfulness.

Pray: "God, thank you for always keeping your good promises; especially the promise of sending your son, Jesus. He is the best gift! In Jesus' name, amen."

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Ashlee Grosjean, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.